

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 16<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

**PORTFOLIO:** Employment, Learning and Skills, Leisure, Community and Culture

**SUBJECT:** Sports Facility Fees and Charges

**WARD(S)** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report presents the proposed fees and charges for Halton Leisure Centre and for services provided by the Council's Sports Services for financial year 2025/26.
- 1.2 Included is a proposal to increase the eligibility age for Halton Leisure Card from 60 years to 65 years.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That**

- 1) the proposed fees and charges as set out in Appendix A are approved.**
- 2) Halton Leisure Card age eligibility criteria be raised from current 60 years to 65 years.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The review of fees and charges has been carried out as part of the budget preparations for 2025/26 and the setting of fees and charges for Halton Leisure Centre.
- 3.2 The general aim in setting fees and charges is to ensure the Council recovers costs incurred in providing a service. Historically, the sports service receives a subsidy, for Leisure Centres. The Council determined that it is best placed to provide affordable leisure activities to its residents. The cost of providing a service over the past year and forecast increases for next year are making this more difficult given the impact of inflation, wage increases and the unpredictable nature of utility costs.
- 3.3 It should be noted that Halton Leisure Centre has the potential to generate significant income. Whilst a reduction in expenditure is

expected in some areas of the business, when compared with Kingsway Leisure Centre, the energy costs are expected to increase, as a result of the air source heat pumps.

3.4 Recovering service costs through the year is dependent on a number of factors outside the agreed charges, including:

- Demand – will change year on year and could be determined by a number of drivers such as weather, economy, regional and national events, demographics etc. Demand has further been complicated due to the impact of Covid and increases in the cost of living.
- Competition – There is a strong competitive market. Costs within the private sector are generally lower than in the public sector, for example employee terms and conditions.

3.5 Income targets for the new financial year have been set by the inflation level highlighted in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, at an increase of 2% on 2024/25 budgeted targets.

3.6 A number of fees and charges proposed in Appendix A have been set at an increased percentage rate. Individual fees and charges have been reviewed and increases proposed by service managers that reflect the particular circumstances of each area. This is following an analysis of competitors and nearest neighbour fees and charges. The service is confident, through targeted work and good service delivery that it can reduce the service subsidy, whilst still offering affordable activities.

3.7 Under 8s free swimming

**Under 8 swimming fees comparison**

<b>Halton</b>	<b>Warrington</b>	<b>Knowsley</b>	<b>St Helens</b>
Under 8's - FREE	Under 2's - £1.00	Under 5's - FREE	Under 4's - FREE
Juniors (8-15) - £3.00	Juniors (2-15) - £3.30	Juniors (5-15) - £3.60	Juniors (4-16) - £3.50

3.8 The under 8's swim fee proposal includes the introduction of a £1 fee for all under 8's. 2023/24 free swim under 8's admits total was 9,424, the service anticipates an increase in attendance in 2024/25 thus applying the £1 could generate circa £10,000 income.

- 3.9 School swimming: The hourly cost of a swimming instructor, with on costs, ranges from £18.80 to £20. Most school sessions require 2 teachers. A lesson is 45 minutes thus £30 of the current fee is allocated to instructor costs, leaving basic overheads, such as heating, cleaning, equipment not being met; the proposal is an increase from £33 to £45 per lesson. The proposal, whilst a significant increase, is lower than many providers, such as, £150 per hour for 45 pupils: £63.75 per hour for 20 pupils. The increase would be applied from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.
- 3.10 The Sports Service currently provides a generous discount on activities to Halton Leisure Card holders. Increasing the eligibility age for this card to 65 years, may increase the service income. The retirement age increased some years ago, many residents 60 to 64 years are still working. Average weekly pay for those in 60 years+ bracket is higher than those in the 22 to 29 age bracket (Office for National Statistics, annual survey of hours and earning November 2024). Any resident aged 60 to 64 on a low income would qualify via one of the other eligibility criteria.
- 3.11 The majority of Halton Leisure Cards are issued by the sports service 688 of 724 sold to date, of these 498 have been issued to over 60s, with circa 40% issued to those in 60 – 64 bracket. Most cards are used to receive a discount on activities in Leisure Centres. Increasing the age of eligibility would generate circa £6k per annum. In addition, the proposal is to increase the cost of card by £1 to contribute towards the administrative costs.
- 3.12 The gym membership rates have been compared to other providers, including other local authorities and the proposed increases are in line with these. The gym and class offer are enhanced in the new leisure centre which is also reflected in the proposed charges.
- 3.13 Soft play is a new provision at Halton Leisure Centre; price comparison has been conducted with other local authority providers and will be reviewed during the first year of operation.
- 3.14 As part of the in-year budget monitoring process, actual income from fees and charges will be regularly reviewed against budgeted income. Supporting narrative will be provided within monitoring reports to highlight areas where that may be over or under achieving.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council voluntarily embraces the provision of sport and leisure services without specific funding to do so. Historically, the sector has responded innovatively to funding pressures by developing new sources of income for swimming, fitness classes, room hires or cafes. The marginal profit in these areas has been necessary to cross-subsidise other parts of service delivery, keeping services affordable for all parts of the community.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The financial implications are as presented in the report and appendix.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

There is increased importance on participation in physical activity for the prevention of ill-health and the need to break down barriers to accessing physical activity. Programme and prices are set to provide opportunities for all. "Every £1 spent on sport and physical activity generates almost £4 in return across health and wellbeing, strengthening communities and the national economy." (Sport England)

### **6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

Place shaping to deliver desirable places to live includes spaces to be active where you live, sports facilities are an integral part of the infrastructure that supports the delivery of sport which contributes to Halton's economy.

### **6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

Physical activity can improve people's lives physically, mentally and socially. Learning to swim at a young age can reduce the risk of drowning by up to 88% and develop social skills and psychological benefits.

### **6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

Sports facilities offer a varied programme of use, supporting the wider agenda of access to opportunities and improving life chances.

### **6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

Halton Leisure Centre is a cleaner greener facility adopting greener technologies, including air source heat pumps, the running costs for these may be higher than traditional heating.

### **6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The role of councils is vitally important in the provision of health and wellbeing services. Creating greater cooperation between agencies to create a joint vision to enable communities to be physically active will be an important component in the fight against inactivity and ill health.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There is a requirement for the fees to be paid and in order to avoid the risk of them not being paid; the fees should be received before the service is provided.

7.2 The Council's budget assumes an increase in fees and charges income in line with those proposed in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. If

increases are not approved, it may lead to a shortfall in budgeted income targets.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 There are discounted rates proposed for residents in receipt of certain benefits. People from the most deprived areas and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are most likely to reduce physical activity participation due to cost-of-living increases.

The new centre includes a changing village, changing places facility, inclusive toilets/changing rooms, pool pod, lifts, these facilities and others promote accessibility and inclusion to ensure the time a customer spends at site is relaxed and enjoyable.

## **9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Leisure centres are 'energy hungry' facilities and represent a significant opportunity for the Council to take a meaningful step in reducing carbon footprint and optimise buildings with energy efficiency measures. Air source heat pumps have been installed in Halton Leisure Centre, solar panel and biomass at Brookvale. Energy saving measures such as LED lights, non-concussive taps on sinks and showers are a feature in all facilities.

## **10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.